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CURRENT OPINION

The Evil of Poverty

Several years ago an Oxford priest, Father Cuthbert, writing in the yearbook of the Catholic Social Guild, sang the praises of poverty as a national asset. The Catholic church, he insisted, should maintain the ideal of honest, honorable poverty, which is integral in the Christian scheme of life. To banish poverty would be to close an avenue to spiritual perfection. Rather should the church inculcate honest poverty as a means of grace. From this point of view, which is by no means confined to Father Cuthbert or to his church, a writer in the *Catholic World* for January, Vincent McNabb, dissents emphatically. Distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary poverty, he points to the fact that only the former of these is a virtue. The poverty that is thrust upon one is usually a moral evil, at least in its causes, and always a physical and economic evil, as signifying the want of what is necessary to maintain physical efficiency. The voluntary poverty of the mendicant orders involves no such deprivation. Self-denial as to luxuries and comforts is enjoined, but provision is made against a similar attitude toward the necessities of life. But poverty as it exists in society is simply a state of sin—the sin of theft; some have less than they ought to have because others have more than they ought to have. In support of this contention, no less an authority than Pope Leo XIII is cited, for in the *Rerum Novarum* he expatiates upon unjust and unnecessary suffering, the practical slavery of masses of people under the control of a few very rich men, and urges that poverty is a moral evil, due to hard-heartedness, greed, rapacious usury, and injustice. Such poverty may be voluntarily accepted, not chosen like the so-called poverty of the mendicant orders, but in

that case any benefit accruing is to be credited not to the poverty but to the good will of him who thus accepts it. Again Pope Leo says of the church, "Her desire is that the poor should rise above poverty and wretchedness," and urges that some remedy be found quickly for the conditions he deplores. Our writer recognizes this call of the Pope to destroy poverty as the call of God. Relief is necessary, but justice equally so. The gospel ideal requires the annihilation of the injustice of involuntary poverty; and to that end voluntary poverty may be an effective means, as witness the example of Jesus. Only the mendicants must make their own standard of living the minimum for the poor, as regards housing, food, clothing, education, co-operation, leisure, and liberty. To say that such a minimum is impracticable for society at large is to confess that the mendicants are not really poor. To establish such a standard is neither communism nor the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, but only the beginning of simple justice.

The Religious Basis of Society

In the November *Nineteenth Century*, E. G. A. Holmes blames religion for much that is askew in the present social order, while he presents religion as necessary to the realization of a better future. Society, as an embodiment of our ideals, is at bottom dependent upon religion, which is primarily a matter of realizing ultimate ideals. The present social structure is faulty because based upon an inadequate religion. Therefore the process of reconstructing society must be preceded and paralleled by a reconstruction of religion. What changes are needed? A primary conception in our religion has been the transcendence of God; hence the idea of virtue as consisting

in blind obedience to his revealed will, and a consequent literalism, externalism, excessive individualism, distrust of human nature; and, not least pernicious of all, our religion has had an autocratic cast. The only God we can worship is the immanent God in whom the transcendent God reveals himself, and that is the only kind of worship that counts. But among the implications of such a religion are the potential equality of men, the right of self-realization, hence of controlling environment, hence of sharing in government. On the other hand such growth of personality implies the outgrowing of mere self by disinterested service, and that to the largest possible group, for the larger the group the greater the possibility of unselfish service. It is the larger loyalties that give meaning to the smaller, and at the same time afford scope for the richest development of personality. Love of country is given a deeper content by love of humanity, and that in turn by love of God.

To effect such a reconstruction it is necessary to begin with our educational system, where the demoralizing influence of belief in a transcendent God is strikingly apparent in the autocracy of school government, the system of rewards, bribes, threats, and punishments, wholly extrinsic to proper motives and deterrents, and the absence of an ideal of disinterested service. We make the child selfish, and so the man, and the whole social system. Yet experiment has shown that other methods can be used, and that they secure a response. It is our business to realize the possibilities for training in democracy and unselfishness in our public schools, and to that end religion should be a help rather than a hindrance.

Away from Germany

A somewhat different point of view is expressed by Dr. W. O. Carver in the *Review and Expositor* for January, though he agrees with Mr. Holmes in indicting our

educational system for not taking personality sufficiently into account; and for him, too, the war is the searchlight which exposes the glaring defects for which he seeks a remedy. This failure of modern civilization proves that we need, first of all, a truer idea of education, which we have neither rightly defined nor justly evaluated. "We depend too much on education, and depend on too little education," because we undervalue personality; so that our schools have had as their aim the understanding of the material world rather than the culture of the spirit; we are gaining the world at the expense of our souls. We must connect the present world with the eternal and learn to live in both, otherwise neither can satisfy.

Moreover a larger measure of education is essential, especially in view of the change in our national life from relative isolation to inescapable world-contacts. Democracy is peculiarly dependent upon an educated populace; yet the draft revealed an alarming percentage of illiteracy. Nor is literacy sufficient, as witness Germany and Japan, countries whose illiteracy is practically negligible, but whose schools are rigidly controlled by the government as a means of training the people to serve their masters more efficiently. Such intelligent slavery is far from our ideal, but "ignorant freedom cannot maintain itself against trained slavery," nor preserve itself from dissolution.

There is need also of a new emphasis upon the ethical and religious elements in education. Learning is impotent to effect genuine progress apart from the will to righteousness, as President Butler well urges; so we must Christianize education. The tendency has been wholly in the other direction, due to differences of opinion and policy among Christian bodies as well as to the active efforts of non-Christian forces. This deplorable result can be attributed largely to an identification of religion with

creed. Higher education is rapidly passing from private to state control, with consequences relatively unfavorable to the production of worthy leadership. Primary and secondary education properly belongs to the state. But somehow religion must be introduced.

Finally we need a larger measure of educational freedom, especially from the ascendancy of Germany. This is particularly true of our theological professors, too many of whom have accepted as authoritative reconstructions of biblical history and theology made by men who professed to have insight into the psychology of the ancients, while they utterly failed to comprehend the psychology of Belgium or the United States or, in fact, any of the Allies. Freedom from fads, too, and from excessive experimentation is required to give more stability to our schools, freedom at the same time from formalism and over-systematization, that the personal influence of teachers may have fuller scope, and the personal development of the student may be less hampered. At present the tendency is to give the student a fixed place in a scheme. Furthermore, there is too much control of education by irresponsible outside agencies. The General Education Board and the Carnegie Foundation are too influential, and tend to discriminate in favor of state institutions. The National Education Association is on the wrong track in proposing the standardization of our public schools in the interests of the nation and at the expense of the community and the individual. To do that is to follow Germany, as the demand for compulsory military training clearly signifies.

The Profits of Christianity

"What do we get out of it?" This was the apparently sordid question put to Jesus one day by Peter. Instead of rebuking him, the Master gave him an amazingly gracious answer, in marked contrast to the

attitude of many of his followers who profess to expound his spirit. The answer was a simple, bountiful promise; not for Peter alone, but for everyone who sacrifices what he prizes most for the sake of the Kingdom: an abundant reward not only in the world to come but in this life. This incident and teaching Canon A. C. Deane uses in the December *Expositor* to give point to his contention that the doctrine of reward is not given its rightful place in our time. It is thoroughly biblical, emphasized by Jesus as well as by Paul. The word *misthos*, which they employ frequently, means not an arbitrary gift but wages, something earned. The giver is just, not capricious. There is no conflict between sacrifice and reward as alike inherent in Christian experience, for sacrifice is not the sterile renunciation of asceticism. The doctrine of reward has been abused, but we are in danger of losing a valuable element from experience no less than from theology if we overlook it, as Dr. R. W. Dale confessed when at the end of a long life of recognized leadership in Christian thought he expressed regret that he had neglected that doctrine. Such neglect weakens the legitimate appeal of Christianity and tends to depersonalize God. It is natural for a father to delight in rewarding his child, and for the child to expect such parental recognition. In what does the reward consist? In joy hereafter, indeed; but here in the transfiguration of work and leisure, of love and friendship, in purpose that gives meaning to life, and in peace that is independent of outward conditions.

A Rebuke for Peter

Frederic C. Spurr refers to the same incident of Peter's question and the gracious answer of Jesus, but thinks that Peter did not escape without a rebuke for the spirit prompting his inquiry. Writing in the January *Review and Expositor* he speaks of the parable of the Householder as among

the most hotly debated and least understood of the parables of Jesus. He rejects the interpretation that makes God arbitrary, insisting on his right to do as he pleases, as also that which attributes to the parable the denial of all human merit, while he has little patience with Ruskin in the economic principles which he deduces from this portrayal of oriental life. It is noticeable that the parable follows the episode of the rich young ruler and Jesus' sorrowful comment upon riches as a drag on spirituality. It is here that Peter asks his question, but Jesus, after assuring him that he and his fellows will have abundant recompense for all they have given up, goes on to warn him against the moral consequences of the mercenary spirit suggested by his question. The householder goes to the market place to engage laborers for the whole season of grape culture, a period of several months. Herein lies the point of the story. He wants regular workers on whom he can depend. His problem is to pick out the best help from the great numbers available, so he tries an experiment. Early in the morning he hires a group of men at a wage reached by agreement, satisfactory to them and to him. Later he goes after more and tells them he will pay whatever is right without specifying a sum. Just before the day closes he goes to the rendezvous of the unemployed once more, and tests the sincerity of those who claimed they had been unable to get work, by telling them to work in his vineyard, without a word about wages. Between these men and their employer, as in the case of the second group, there was a moral bond, in this instance because the men hated idleness and were glad of a chance to work; in the other, because they didn't bargain but trusted to his honor. When pay time came, the pettiness of the first group was revealed, as they complained at the householder's generosity in treating others better than they deserved. They were dismissed as

merely working for money, not the kind of labor their employer wanted; the others he engaged for the season. He was looking for permanent service, not just day labor, subject to mood or impulse from without. One hour of loving service outweighs a whole day of self-seeking toil.

God's Duty to Man

Theologians, when discussing the relations obtaining between God and man, usually place an almost exclusive emphasis upon man's duty to God. Seldom are the rights of humankind over against their Creator even mentioned, nor God's obligations to his creatures. But creation clearly implies responsibility, and fatherhood still more. Thus F. W. Orde Ward dismisses the analogy of potter and clay which hardly represents Paul at his best, and seeks to show how different God really is. In his articles in the *Homiletic Review* for January, he maintains that God has to reckon with us as finite; we have our rights, God has his responsibilities. Does he recognize them? Apparently not, judging by many facts of our experience. What then are we to conclude? Not that he fails in intent, but rather in ability. He cannot do for us all that he wants to because of our limitations and his. Our only solution is that God, too, is developing, that his potential almightiness is not yet realized. The Father cannot liberate his children until he becomes free in us. Every breach in Bourbonism and obscurantism, whether political, social, or religious, helps to release divine energies. There is "a kind of spiritual identification of interests on the plane of eternity:" men are growing more divine, and God more human. God's indebtedness to man is recognized in his incarnation and his suffering, which makes him infinitely nobler than the impassible Deity of the theologians. The price of divinity is the eternal sacrifice of vicarious suffering. On the other hand, man cannot renounce

either his earthly or his heavenly birthright. "Personality (the Godlike part of us) is power."

Has Science Capitulated?

Forty years ago science was mainly materialistic, and was implacably hostile to religion, which returned the compliment. Matthew Arnold and Arthur Hugh Clough were typical of thinking men whose faith was undermined by their rationalism, a rationalism that made itself felt within the churches as well. At the same time there was a pronounced growth of mammon worship, luxury, and pleasure-seeking, which has survived to this day in the face of a remarkable reaction which has been almost uniformly favorable to the Christian faith. Thus Rev. E. C. E. Owen argues in the December *Fortnightly*, adducing as evidence a number of specific changes in science and in the attitude of scientific men.

First of all science has become dematerialized: the category of *power* has replaced that of *matter*. At the same time more deference is paid to the human mind, which is regarded as more complex and mysterious, especially in the realm of the subconscious. Thus many phenomena, accepted without question in the middle ages, and as unhesitatingly rejected by the nineteenth century, have been rehabilitated on scientific grounds. Old powers of the mind have been reinstated, new powers discovered. As examples he cites conversion and miraculous healing as being more intelligible in the light of suggestion, the response to which is akin to faith. Telepathy, too, whatever its limitations, has a bearing on prayer as more than a merely subjective experience, and upon the possibility of communicating with the dead which even now eminent scientists and philosophers are not only investigating but proclaiming as a fact.

The trend of philosophy, likewise, has been distinctly in favor of religion, as witness

the revival of idealism and Bergson's attack upon determinism and upon the sovereignty of the intellect. Philosophers recognize the necessity of paying attention to religious beliefs as something in human experiences and to be accounted for. Thus in the field of biblical criticism, instead of a Tübingen school we have Harnack and Ramsay as representative of the great majority of biblical scholars who are giving larger credence to the records of the Old Testament and the New. Literature, too, gives evidence of a similar tendency, notably in France, where such men as Brunetière, Bourget, Huysmans, Coppée, and Bazin are frank in their avowal of faith in contrast with former skepticism.

Religion, too, has changed, but not in the direction of science, nor of liberal Christianity, as witness the mysticism of Dean Inge, Evelyn Underhill, and Rufus Jones, and the evangelicalism of Schweitzer. Christianity, progressive though it be, is still mainly traditional, holding tenaciously to a Christ at once divine and human. The war has had its effect in this matter, especially as discrediting German morality and religion, both alike the result of a liberal theology which interprets the teachings of the Bible according to convenience. Furthermore, the bankruptcy of civilization and science apart from religion has been revealed, while in the great upheaval the sense of necessity and order has been shattered, and a new belief in freedom and the power of will has emerged. Finally, the presence or imminence of pain, danger, and death has accentuated the need for help from above; not resignation but comfort and deliverance are the answer to that need, which is but a demand for "the authentic message of the church and the promise of eternal life."

Our Erratic Idealism

Is American idealism a virtue, a disease, or an illusion? This is the question that

Henry Seidel Canby discusses without professing to answer in the *Century* for December. At least he seeks an answer, an attitude preferable to that of many who vociferously jibe at this idealism as a nuisance. A strong case can be made for idealism, especially during the war, for it was the identical prime motive all the way through that made us sympathize with the Allies, yet kept us out of the conflict until April, 1917, and then plunged us in headlong, namely, a reaction against arbitrary violence whether used against others, against us, or by us. Important as were the dread of the future and the need of immediate defense as factors drawing us into the struggle, they were really subordinate to this primary idealistic reaction against violence. Yet a comparison of public utterances during that period in this country with those made in Great Britain and France suggests not so much a monopoly of idealism on this side the Atlantic as a tincture of sentimentalism. Was our war idealism a diseased virtue? We professed to fight for a square deal, the consent of the governed, and the substitution of justice for violence, principles to which the treaty, necessarily a compromise, runs counter in many respects; and largely because in the early months of last year our idealism slept we were uncritical as to the major issues involved, indifferent to the terms of the treaty, and all the fervor in evidence was displayed by the protagonists of a chauvinistic disregard for the facts and obligations of our relations to the peoples of Europe. In Great Britain a much deeper and more general interest was manifested in the problems before the Versailles conference. Was, then, our vaunted idealism no more than an emotion, an overheated virtue whose collapse is only too apparent? Was it not rather a quality more like energy than a moral characteristic; a blend of physical virility and nervous sensitiveness,

dependent for its existence upon the pressure of external circumstances?

A study of two notable Americans of the eighteenth century may help us to understand the nature of our idealism. Jonathan Edwards is best known as a preacher of infant damnation, but his real influence has been that he "crystallized for Americans the Calvinistic ethics which was the backbone of Puritan civilization." He more than any other impressed upon his countrymen the necessity of willing the right, which thus became a mental habit in our morality, a chief factor in our idealism. Benjamin Franklin, on the other hand, a man of broader experience and outlook, who saw that sin is not sin because it is forbidden but is forbidden because it is sin, recognized the function of intelligence in conduct and taught an idealism of common sense, reasonableness, fairness, to which may be in part attributed the freeing of the slaves, our policy in Cuba and the Philippines, and our reaction to the rape of Belgium. Both of these characteristics are operative at present and both are dangerous; we have a perverted will to do right, a degenerated common sense. The former deprived of its theological basis has become a restless urge, a putting the best foot forward in individual and national life, a shortsighted optimism, a determination to be good and happy at once without regard to circumstances or necessary preliminaries. To it is due perhaps our progressiveness but more certainly our sentimentalism, for it is not a reasoned purpose but a mental habit which readily becomes hysterical and erratic. We have a purpose to reform the world before our brains are ready for the task, so that our idealism is feverish and uncertain. Meanwhile Franklin's common sense, a very good principle for a man of Franklin's character and intelligence, has degenerated into a materialistic rationalism, too reasonable to be sordid, but too materialistic to be

truly reasonable. It has thus become hostile to idealism especially the kind that has come down to us from Edwards, and responsible for all that is suggested by the phrase "business is business." The influence of Edwards leads to professions of virtue that cannot be made good, due as they are to habit rather than to conviction. "It set the will going but left the brain unmoved," while the common sense of Franklin, bereft of its basis of character and enlightened reason has become suspicious of ideas and theories especially when they are altruistic. The American reformer has more energy than reason; the materialist has kept his common sense and lost his vision. During the war it was easy to be idealistic. To make our idealism effective, the disciples of Edwards need a basis of enlightened reason; while nothing less than conversion will do for the followers of Franklin. "Each generation must search out the foundations of its own morality and determine for itself the worth and power of the ideals it professes."

Liberty or License

Perhaps at no time in our history has there been a more general interest in the question of freedom of opinion and speech, and perhaps never has such freedom been challenged as now. What do we really mean by freedom, and how much tolerance do we really possess? In the *Open Court* for December, M. Jay Flannery presents as his judgment that there has been little or no gain in the principle of toleration since the Middle Ages. We pride ourselves upon the advance we have made in freedom of thought and expression. We point to persecution and martyrdom as outworn attempts to restrain freedom. But we often forget that such restraints were the exception rather than the rule, and that is why we hear about them. These exceptions are much more significant to us than they were to the people of their times, most of whom were

as free as they wanted to be. Not only, however, do we exaggerate the intolerance of the past, but it is a question whether there is any truer liberty now than then. What do we mean by the distinction between liberty and license? Simply that there are limits to free speech according to the subject discussed. All depends upon whether that is a matter of comparative indifference or regarded as too sacred to be trifled with. There is more tolerance as to the church and religion now because they are taken less seriously. Instead nationalism has become the sacred ark, or perhaps it is really industrialism using nationalism as protective coloring. Of these we may not speak lightly. Was the motive of military intervention in Russia to free the majority of the people from the tyranny of the minority, or rather fear of the soviet system? Really there has been little if any progress; our vaunted freedom is as limited as ever.

A visitor from England, Graham Wallas, who for twenty-two years has been conversant with American life, notes with alarm the increase of intolerance as he found it in November, 1919, and he bestows the faithful blows of a friend through the medium of the January *Atlantic*. Formerly he has noticed the tendency of good-natured majorities to deal summarily with minorities, but now he finds the abrogation of freedom of speech, writing, and meeting advocated. In the case of many newspapers and public speakers, supported by a large body of public opinion, the presumption is against freedom. Such words as "bolshevik," "radical," and "red" are used loosely, and those to whom they are applied are as indiscriminately condemned. The approval of Judge Gary manifested in the moving-picture houses of New York would seem to imply indorsement of his attitude: that what he defines as "bolshevism" must be crushed. This is a dangerous temper in which to deal with new problems which require patient

investigation and new methods of treatment. These problems are largely industrial in their origin, but we fail to deal with them at the root. President Wilson's *new freedom* of 1912 has dropped out of sight. In order to secure more efficient production, fairer distribution, and a reasonable measure of self-determination for the producer, it is imperative not only that we positively encourage free discussion but that we provide practical opportunities for the same. For we cannot depend upon the newspapers for guidance, as is all too evident in the lack of exploring thought and considered statement in articles bearing upon the issues of the day. Everything is a "knock" or a "boost." The effect of this situation upon our political and social thinkers warrants serious consideration, for political science arouses human passions as the other sciences do not, and it takes courage as well as brains to proclaim some new things. Thorstein Veblen's *Imperial Germany*, suggested as anti-German propaganda in 1918 because it analyzes so well the causes of German aggression, had been previously barred from the mails by the postmaster-general and is still barred. Such is the stupidity of those who are to be intrusted with the task of "stamping out bolshevism." Why is it that American writers on social and political subjects are usually timid and conventional, qualities that leaders of industry would not tolerate in their surgeons, engineers, and chemists? Yet they seem to be content.

Democratizing Heaven

Hymnology is largely a reflection of current social situations. While the materials are largely biblical, derived mostly from the Old Testament, then from the Pauline theology, and to a less extent from the life and teachings of Jesus, the background is largely that of the times in which the sacred lyrics were written. In them are traceable the characteristic marks of the

literary movements of three centuries, and of accompanying or underlying political and social currents as well. Hymns from the Napoleonic era represent Christian experience as a struggle, as for example, "Oft in Danger, Oft in Woe," and "Look, Ye Saints, the Sight Is Glorious." Later from the days of Victorian imperialism come "Onward, Christian Soldiers!" and "We March, We March to Victory." Many of our missionary hymns have this imperialistic undertone. Along with hymns of struggle are those which picture the other world as a release from conflict and toil, and it is this class of hymns that suggests to a writer in the *Dial* for January 20 the need of "making heaven safe for democracy." We no longer sing with enthusiasm

I'm but a stranger here;
Heaven is my home,

because the heaven of our hymns doesn't interest us. Characteristic are such lines as these:

In thee no sorrow can be found,
Nor grief, nor care, nor *toil*

or

Then shall my labors have an end
When I thy joys shall see.

One is reminded of the lotus-eaters and their song,

Oh, rest ye brother mariners,
We will not wander more.

"Beautiful as apocalyptic vision but dangerous as a way of life" is the judgment of the writer who sees in such expressions nothing to attract the self-respecting worker of today. The mixture of tribal ritual and dreams of medieval empire that fills so many of our hymns tends to make religion appear out of contact with life. Men contrast heaven as there portrayed to earth as they know it, to the disadvantage of the former. In "America, the Beautiful" we have a new type of hymn answering to the idealism of our day; such hymns we need.